



H1N1 Virus Partner Briefing

Influenza A (H1N1) Virus

August 5, 2009, 3 p.m.

Rhode Island: 199 confirmed positive cases, 75 hospitalized to date, 3 deaths
National Report: 47 states (including DC, American Samoa, Guam, Puerto Rico & Virgin Islands) with 5,514 hospitalized cases, 353 deaths

Both seasonal influenza viruses and H1N1 virus will be causing illness this fall and winter. An increase in serious illness and death is predicted. The Rhode Island Department of Health (HEALTH) strongly recommends that you and your children receive the seasonal flu vaccine this year. Although the seasonal flu vaccine is unlikely to provide protection against H1N1, it will provide protection against seasonal flu, thus reducing your risk of getting sick with both types of flu. Contracting both illnesses will increase the risk for serious complications. A vaccine against H1N1 is currently in production, **but it is not meant to replace the seasonal flu vaccine.** HEALTH expects to receive the seasonal flu vaccine before the H1N1 vaccine, and recommends that you get vaccinated as soon as it becomes available. The seasonal flu vaccine will provide protection for the 2009/2010 flu season (September 30, 2009 – March 31, 2010).

How are H1N1 and seasonal influenza *similar*?

H1N1 and seasonal influenza are both contagious respiratory illnesses that can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to hospitalization or death. The viruses cause similar symptoms (fever plus cough or fever plus sore throat). Preventive measures, such as washing your hands often with warm water and soap, covering your cough and staying home if you feel sick, help prevent the spread of germs that cause both types of influenza.

How are H1N1 and seasonal influenza *different*?

H1N1 is a new flu virus. This means that people have not built up immunity to the virus in the same way they have to seasonal flu viruses. Evidence to date suggests that young people have especially low immunity to H1N1. This is unusual when compared to seasonal flu viruses, which tend to affect adults born before 1957 more than younger age groups. Older adults may have some immunity to H1N1 from prior infections and vaccinations.

How are the H1N1 and seasonal influenza vaccines different?

HEALTH expects an ample supply of seasonal flu vaccine this year. This vaccine will protect against seasonal influenza. Since H1N1 is a new type of influenza virus, there currently is no vaccine to protect against it. The government is working with five vaccine manufacturers to produce H1N1 vaccine. The initial supply of H1N1 vaccine will most likely be limited. HEALTH is using CDC guidance to prioritize target groups for initial H1N1 vaccination. This will ensure that people at a higher risk of infection or complications from H1N1 receive the vaccine first. As demand for the vaccine among these groups is met, other groups may receive the vaccine. It is also expected that H1N1 vaccine will require two shots for full protection.

Why should I get a seasonal influenza vaccine annually?

Vaccination is the best way to prevent seasonal influenza and to avoid spreading it to others who are at high risk of developing flu-related complications. Seasonal flu viruses change from year to year, which means that the immunity you develop after getting sick with previous flu viruses may not protect you against newer strains of the flu. The seasonal flu vaccine is updated every year to include current viruses.

Additional Resources

HEALTH at <http://www.health.ri.gov> ; H1N1 Information Line (M-F 8:30am- 4:30pm) 401-222-8022

CDC at <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/>

WHO at <http://www.who.int/csr/disease/swineflu/en/index.html>